



BROTHER BROTHER

an opera

music and text by Aaron Siegel

WORK SAMPLE RECORDINGS

Track 1 - There's Always Mom (8:08)

Track 2 - Kitty Hawk (Brother's Tears) (12:03)

Track 3 - Interlude (2:25)

Track 4 - The Silent Puzzle Played (8:52)

RECORDING CREDITS

MANTRA Percussion: Joe Bergen and Al Cerulo - Vibraphones, Michael McCurdy - Glockenspiel; Erin Wight - Viola, Mariel Roberts - Cello, Roberta Michel - Flute, Michele Kennedy - Soprano, Patrick Fennig - Countertenor, Jonathan Hampton - Tenor, Steven Hrycelak - Bass, Amy Lynn Stewart - Actor, Ryan McCarthy - Actor

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CAST

Singing Roles

Mother Fate, Soprano
Wilbur Wright, Tenor
Orville Wright, Countertenor
SATB Chorus

Acting Roles

RED - Male Actor
BLUE - Male Actor
Distant Voices - Male and Female Actors

Orchestra

Vibraphone 1
Vibraphone 2
Glockenspiel
Flute
Viola
Cello

It seems to me then as if all the moments of our life occupy the same space, as if future events already existed and were only waiting for us to find our way to them at last, just as when we have accepted an invitation we duly arrive in a certain house at a given time.

-W. G. Sebald

There is no memory to which time does not put an end, and no pain that death does not abolish.

-The Knight of the Mournful Countenance

SYNOPSIS

PART ONE

THERE'S ALWAYS MOM

This overture is sung by the CHORUS and hints at the broad themes of the opera--the passage of time, the unforgiving nature of fate, the search for belief and the serenity of returning home.

KITTY HAWK (BROTHER'S TEARS)

MOTHER FATE tells a condensed version of the Wright Brothers' story, from their humble beginnings in West Dayton, Ohio, to their triumphant first flight on the dunes in Kitty Hawk.

On a nameless ocean beach, the young fictional brothers RED and BLUE are introduced through a list of questions ranging from the intimate to the absurd. These questions reveal a relationship full of mundane details and naiveté. Whereas the Wright Brothers are seen as almost mythical in their stature, RED and BLUE are undeniably pedestrian, though their intimacy is striking and disarming.

THE SILENT PUZZLE PLAYED

The Chorus returns to announce the exile of both sets of brothers from their innocence. For the Wright Brothers, their discovery of flight marked the beginning of a 3-year suspension of their flight experiments in order to protect their patents and build their airplane manufacturing business. During this time the brothers begin to hear imaginary voices doubtful of their achievement. Their business affairs pull the brothers farther from home where their accomplishments are questioned and their integrity impugned.

RED and BLUE discover that their sick mother had an affair that ruined her marriage and left their family in tatters. Following their mother's death, RED and BLUE run away from their childhood home towards separate futures.

Distant Voices from both brothers' pasts deliver advice about how to live their lives.

PART TWO

IF ONLY ALONE

ORVILLE and WILBUR leave for Europe to sell their plane to the French and British governments. Their refusal to demonstrate their planes raises some concern amongst potential buyers. The brothers spend their time writing letters, fixing contracts and fretting about their colleagues who are attempting to chip away at their accomplishments. During lunch at a Parisian café, WILBUR begins to doubt the meaning of flight in general. Despite the scientific achievements, WILBUR wonders whether their invention will lead to the kind of personal fulfillment he had anticipated.

A GIRL

Having lived apart for several years, RED and BLUE have grown distant from each other. Their disconnect is apparent in a telephone conversation they have during which BLUE tries to share the news that he has found a woman whom he loves and wants to marry. RED is suspicious of BLUE's love and responds to his adorations with rude and dismissive questions.

At the same time, ORVILLE and WILBUR become involved in a serious of heated litigations over violations of their airplane patents. They are left with no other choice than to defend their innovations in a court of law and spend a majority of their energy attempting to prove that their inventions came before any others. This process proves exhausting and, though they appear to be winning their lawsuits, WILBUR's health is affected to the point that he collapses in the courtroom.

A SPECIAL CHARM

Left with a terrible feeling of distance from and anger towards his brother, RED wonders how to regain closeness with BLUE. His contemplation begins with an egotistical examination of his own part in the rift, but then turns towards a desire to rekindle a connection through some kind of collaboration.

WILBUR feels even more alone after his sudden collapse. From the courtroom floor, he wonders whether he will ever recover from his sickness and laments the likelihood that he won't live to see his successes heralded. RED remembers some of the earliest examples of a shared passion with BLUE, and as his imaginary duet with WILBUR ends, RED commits to a renewed sense of shared purpose with his brother.

PART THREE

ALL IS SET

Following his revelation and recommitment to his brother, RED sets out to reunite with BLUE. WILBUR's condition has worsened, despite his having been relocated to the Wright family home on Hawthorne Street in Dayton, Ohio. ORVILLE holds a vigil over the sick WILBUR. The CHORUS returns in this scene to restate their predictions from the overture. They are defiant that their predications of the brothers' fate are true, though, MOTHER FATE hints at the possibility that their premonitions were not completely accurate.

SPARROW SONG

Still in vigil by WILBUR's bedside, ORVILLE laments the impending death of his brother and expresses his discomfort with carrying on the Wright Brother's project. WILBUR eventually dies, and in the aftermath, the work studio in the Hawthorne Street home burns in an accidental fire. Many of the original drawings and tools that helped the Wright Brothers invent their airplane are destroyed.

Following their reunion, RED and BLUE begin to collaborate on an intensive building project. It is not entirely clear what they are building, but they consult blueprints and start to erect a large scaffolding to aid in their work.

SERIOUS WORK

ORVILLE, now old and dependent upon a cane, sits mute in a museum bearing likeness to his original Hawthorne workshop. He is surrounded by models of the Wright Flyer, bicycles, kites, a wind tunnel and propeller toys. All the while, RED and BLUE continue work on their building project and it appears to be taking over the entire stage. It becomes evident that they do not have a clear plan of what they are building. Despite this, they are engaged in a heated discussion on the nature of work and other tangential topics.

LIBRETTO

PART ONE

THERE'S ALWAYS MOM

This overture is sung by a small chorus, alone in the middle of a sand dune. A fleet of wooden "propeller" toys is visible in the distance.

CHORUS

Same as Always
Silent Story
Hold out under
Rain.

Winter's reason
Stoic action
Bent on timeless
Name.

Underneath
Men aloud
Cry for him
kneel about
noble men
turned around
sing for help
knowing doubt.

These are
Waiting
Soon for
Taking
Home.

KITTY HAWK (BROTHER'S TEARS)

As the propeller toys and chorus depart, ORVILLE and WILBUR WRIGHT are seen in the background tinkering with one of their early-model planes, as the young brothers RED and BLUE play in the sand near the water in the foreground.

MOTHER FATE

Who'll fly first
In West Dayton, a
Wind tunnel and
Mandolin

RED

Are you
Familiar
with the sound
of mice
scurrying overhead?
Would you say
that this sound
is
made by mice
rushing towards a scrap of food,
or are the mice just
playing with each other
the same way we might "have a catch" or
"kick the ball around?"
If someone asked
whether
the number of blades of grass
on a small
lawn outnumbered all the trees
in the world
would consider this question
foolish?
Have you ever been to Brazil?
Do you know
what a Japanese
maple tree looks like?
If a friend
asked you to come over
and do some yardwork,
would you
reserve a couple of hours
for this work or

would you expect it to take all day?
Have you ever come across a frozen animal in your yard?
If so,
did you find yourself staring at the frozen animal
for longer than you would now
think appropriate?

MOTHER FATE

Preacher man, in a
Fine collar.
They were two, let's
Flip this dollar.

RED

When buying carpet
do you think it
more effective
to get a soft carpet
and a hard foam underneath or
a hard carpet
and a soft foam underneath?
Have you ever been
a part of a job wheel?
Can you remember the last time
you fell asleep holding
someone else's hand?
Would you have a harder time
trusting someone who
is afraid of snakes or
someone who is afraid
of the dark?
If you were at a party
and you ran into someone whose name
you couldn't remember,
would you
avoid using any name
altogether
or would you apologize
and ask the person their name?

MOTHER FATE

We'll fly a kite, and
Glide away.
Come onboard.
Shall we pray?

RED

Do you mind
the feeling of someone else's facial hair
rubbing against your cheek?

If,

during a dinner party,
you were asked

"Do you believe in god?"

would you answer earnestly or
change the subject?

Do you know
how to replace
a faucet?

Have you ever showered
with a cricket?

Are you familiar
with the term
"bilko doors?"

How many cherries
would you need to
make enough preserves for the winter?

If you have a piano
in your house,
is it in tune?

MOTHER FATE

Close your eyes.

Let's hold hands.

Go low to the ground,
Where it's safe for man.

RED

When

you imagine a picturesque evening
in front of a fire,

did you make the fire or
did someone else make it?

What's the difference
between a living room and
a sitting room?

Do you
remember the name of
the first video game you ever played?

How tall
was the first person you slept with?

Is there any music
you can't stand to listen to
because it reminds you of a time
you would rather forget?
Speaking of which,
do you hate anyone?
Have you ever missed a holiday
due to
sudden hospitalization?
Is there enough happiness in the world
to go around or
is there a limited amount
that we all have to share?

MOTHER FATE

Lying Flat,
Upon two rails,
With a gust against
And wings like sails.

RED

Do you have a strategy to avoid kidnapping?
Have you given
any thought to how you might
communicate something important to
a loved one
if you were under surveillance?
Do you have any feelings
about wallpaper?
What
is a good reason to cry?
Do you have a keen eye
for when a room
is a part of an addition
to a house?
Do you know
how to operate a siphon?
Have you ever used
a trash compactor?
Why do strawberry plants
only produce fruit
every other year?
Can you tell the difference
between a 56' Corvette
and one from 57'?

MOTHER FATE

Did you see? That
Man in air?
A hundred feet, and
Life to spare.

RED

When was the last time
you felt safe?
Of the secrets you have ever kept,
are there any
it would now be okay to share?
What is
the secret?
Have you ever
used a hose to clear leaves
off a driveway?
Would you consider this a fun activity
or a chore?
What is the ideal angle
for a sledding hill?
Have you ever built a go-cart?
Do you know anyone
with only one arm?
Are you frightened
by the sight of a German Shepard?
Does the prospect
of mutually assured destruction
excite you?
Is there a season of the year
that you most associate
with the end of time?
Can you pinpoint the moment
your childhood ended?
When was that?

MOTHER FATE

Our secret's safe
For three more years
Beneath the front
Of brother's tears.

THE SILENT PUZZLE PLAYED

ORVILLE and WILBUR return to their work shed/hangar ecstatic from their successful flight, but also fearful of the implications of their invention. RED and BLUE return to their home where they are caretakers for their sick mother. The CHORUS returns and the brothers hear the distant voices of their ancestors.

CHORUS

Away from

Ohio.

To show and now away.

The silent puzzle played.

DISTANT VOICE (WOMAN)

Don't ask me why I did it.

CHORUS

And ancient finite space unveiled

Can all believe and all agree:

DISTANT VOICE (WOMAN)

Dearest Children: I know what you're thinking, a letter to the future, I wouldn't know how to start one of those.

DISTANT VOICE (MAN)

Flying just isn't what it used to be. There were birds nesting outside our kitchen window and we would greet them every morning. And it was reasonable for them to be flying around – they were birds after all – it was in their blood. People would come and go and the birds were always flitting about. Wonderful birds – not the pretty birds, though – these were regularly grey birds, and they lived regular lives. No red or blue feathers to distract them – make them feel special – these were birds with morals. Birds who knew where they were supposed to be. Birds who ate worms and carried various straws in their mouths to build new nests and birds who struggled to stay still and who refused to look you in the eye. That's because you can't look at both of a bird's eyes.

DISTANT VOICE (WOMAN)

He was new to the home, but he wasn't afraid like the rest of them – happy to lend a hand, hang a shelf. He drove me to the grocery store every Thursday. I usually need at least milk, but when I can I get cherries and once we ate them on the ride home – rich and meaty cherries – the kind that leaves the inside of your mouth dark red and all

for ten dollars. A ride to and back, very cheerful fellow – told me about the war and why we don't stand a chance.

DISTANT VOICE (WOMAN)

If you can, you ought to check in with your aunt sometime. She is always hurting from something. It's in her bones—a kind of longing. When you least expect it someone will ask you for a kindness and whether or not your feel up to it I urge you to consider a blessing in the summer—for the safety of our world—it would be a shame to lose it so soon. The world is too young, barely alive and we still have coupons to redeem for frozen peas and aluminum-lined bags of cookies. Pecan pie and seltzer. More fun than laughing.

DISTANT VOICE (MAN)

Don't lose your head. Or don't let it get too big. Your work is god's work and longer than that. You fly, work on important things that people build monuments for. Idolatry, even of the self, even imaginary, is below, below. If it's not you then who is it? That's what you should remember. Who was it?

DISTANT VOICE (WOMAN)

If you had told me we were going to fly I wouldn't have believed you. I don't care for the sound and your father is worried and tired from his letter writing and lawsuits. They won't give him a break, but he believes and that is good enough. And so do you, for now at least, without the record to show for what? Things go up and down again and always on time. Who cares how long? It's god's way and if he knows, then we all do. But remember what it means to believe, and ask your brother about it when you don't. One of you should keep it straight.

ORVILLE and WILBUR pick up as much of their plane as they can and escape into the night. RED and BLUE quickly pack their bags and leave their home as their mother dies.

CHORUS

Were time alone, afraid,
And us together still
Could autumn be
A grand mirage?

CHORUS

Tomorrow,
Tomorrow.

PART TWO

IF ONLY ALONE

Orville and Wilbur sit in a busy Parisian Café.

WILBUR

If you close your eyes, can you image what your voice sounds like? I think mine must sound like yours. But then I try to hear your voice and I can't — like you're always alone in the air, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

Always alone in the air, says Orville.

WILBUR

And I close my eyes and think about something I must have said, something for sure I must have said but everything I think I said I am sure now was said by someone else — it's a terrible predicament it is, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

A terrible predicament indeed, says Orville.

WILBUR

Can you imagine if things continue like this and instead of hearing myself I just hear other people and they're all saying things I thought were things that I had said, things in my voice, from my head, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

From your voice, and your head, says Orville.

WILBUR

Exactly, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

Exactly, says Orville.

WILBUR

This is my head and these are my ideas and if anyone should hear them it should be me, I know, and they should sound sweet, absolutely sweet like a light breeze and a full sail, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

A light breeze and a full sail, says Orville.

WILBUR

Oh, I wish I could sound like the wind, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

The wind is a sound, says Orville.

WILBUR

A wonderful sound, in my ear it sounds like a beautiful lady a sweet lovely lady, the sound of a lady is alive when it sounds, full of life when it sounds, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

Full of life when it sounds, says Orville.

WILBUR

Like the wind when it sounds, all around when it sounds, a beautiful lady around, I like the sound of that, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

The sound of that, says Orville.

WILBUR

But what if it's not and the only thing to know is that no one every will know. Not even if we say so will they know and it won't matter what it sounds like because it will be so soft and alone, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

So soft and alone, says Orville.

WILBUR

Even the biggest things will be soft and no one will care all alone all alone...we will have carried the load in the eyes of just us, carried so much and driven so far, our mother died and we kept moving along since to stop would have been just as exhausting and I've been sick in bed determined to move and it's not like flying – no it's definitely not like flying, assuredly not at all, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

Most certainly no, says Orville.

WILBUR

Except that maybe it is just as much all alone seeing lights all alone and flat on the back staring up through the roof to the sky all alone and the fever is thick everything else is so small all the people who walk down

below are so small radiant and pure but so is everything from that distance all alone and the sand is the sea swallowing up pulling in, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

The sand is the sea, swallowing up, pulling in, says Orville.

WILBUR

It's impossible to say whether from there we can honestly hear even the loudest of sounds above the roar of the motor, the fever, the people who don't, don't believe, can't imagine the lift of the wind off the ground, no matter the sound or the sickness alone otherwise rational persons, true there's this god, but really we're here in the air, on the ground, in this sick bed all alone with or without sounds and if you close your eyes you can see what you want, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

What you want, you can see, says Orville.

WILBUR

And for miles up there arcs to flat lines far away and what we thought was alone not just that but afraid and they can't find each other from up in the sky, over trees or vast forests up there and a point has no mass if it's accurately laid on a map from above from the sky we're all small and alone, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

Up above, from the sky, all alone, says Orville.

WILBUR

From the sky, all alone, up above and alone, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

All alone, in the sky, says Orville.

WILBUR

All alone, says Wilbur.

ORVILLE

If only alone, says Orville.

A GIRL

BLUE and RED are away from home in different places and talk to each other over the phone. In a background courtroom scene, ORVILLE and WILBUR argue their sides in one of the many patent cases brought on behalf of their invention.

BLUE

There's a girl.

RED

Is she tall and is she sweet?

BLUE

She's from the north side of the city.

RED

Does she spend her summers in the company of other men?

BLUE

She comes from a broken home, too.

RED

What color nail polish does she wear?

BLUE

She's great in bed.

RED

Can she speak Spanish?

BLUE

We can talk for so long.

RED

Do you think she knows what it means to be close?

BLUE

We went for a trip together. Drove our car into the beautiful desert.

RED

What does she think about the government's role in perpetuating poverty?

BLUE

When we talk about the future I feel great.

RED

Has she seen the French film with the long tracking shot of the boy running away at the end?

BLUE

We have sex in the morning. Stunning, full-nosed sex.

RED

Where did you say she was from again?

BLUE

She glistens in the dawn's glory.

RED

She wants to be a lawyer, doesn't she? Doesn't she want to be a lawyer?

BLUE

She would be a wonderful mother.

RED

Money notwithstanding, can you satisfy her needs?

BLUE

Sometimes I think no one knows what it means to be close.

RED

After you imagine your children, balancing on willow roots in the front yard, do you think about being asked by a judge to pick your favorite?

BLUE

The snow covers everything with round edges and it looks like eternity.

RED

When the power goes out in the middle of the night, and you have to stumble downstairs to the fuse, are you a hero?

BLUE

I can hold my breath under water for over a minute.

RED

Do you ever imagine your own death in a fireball of a plane?

BLUE

If I need to, I can always try something new.

RED

Where is the center of your body?

BLUE

After a long trip nothing feels as good as a glass of water.

RED

Are you absolutely sure you want to do this?

BLUE

I only want my love.

RED

Can I count on you?

RED and BLUE hang up on each other angrily. At the height of his argument in the courtroom WILBUR collapses from exhaustion.

A SPECIAL CHARM

After he hangs up the phone RED looks out the window of his room in thought. From the courtroom floor, WILBUR stares into space beyond the confusion of his sudden sickness.

WILBUR

Here I am...

RED

Like coming out of a fever...

WILBUR

In that sickness again...

RED

That's how this feels with all the confusion and long stories of well-attended memorial services. Did you hear how all those people hushed around, as upset as I have been, lonely in their pity? All those people singing mournful songs in a language they know only from memory, in rows torn apart by their own devotion. Only the song makes it out in my version, buffered every verse by more and more colors. Remote dispatches from textured memories...

WILBUR

Collapsed on this floor in a ravenous sweat
I wish it were more convenient to blame
Another man, even our god for this sordid affair.

RED

Let us praise the hallucinations we share—empty buildings lit from the inside and clear as hamster dens. We are all theater-goers on cement bleachers, the same story in these moments as there has ever been. Assured paths from locations scouted years in advance to those we now occupy only by chance.

WILBUR

But I fear this time nothing will come
To relieve and so amend this horrible pain.

RED

How many years have we waited for this moment? Torn ourselves away for the possibility of these connections? Asked needless questions full of ancient characters—those we likely would not recognize now despite assuming so? How many years?

WILBUR

Not even a judge, has he affirmed our rights
Could order a verdict on lingering nights.

RED

We ought to drink water to our salvation, empty our bladders behind
leafless bushes and stand next to each other, holding hands – not for
want of security, but for warmth – that radiance of our confusion.

WILBUR

Who am I after all to expect a cure?
The physics of lift reserved for harder souls

RED sits down at his desk to write a letter.

RED

This might amount to something, though nothing like the lift of
invention. Huddled together in singular focus – my story just as
evident as the ticks on a ruler or the angle of ascension.

WILBUR

And regardless of me there could still come about
Something of a story to tell all who ask.

RED

Was it after we shared a room that our father read morals to us?
Courage, Determination, Patience, and we learned for the first time that
being brothers was a special charm.

WILBUR

And I'll leave it to Orville to share, he'll be fine
Only half of it, to say, will forever be mine.

RED

One of us might have burnt our mouth on hot coals, but instead we
both were rendered mute by our awe in each other, not that we needed
to learn this for ourselves – it has been told of us from all evening
banter: That we are one – have always been.

WILBUR lies still, but alive, on the courtroom floor.

PART THREE

ALL IS SET

The chorus returns presiding again over two simultaneous scenes. In the first, RED is in transit to reunite with BLUE. In the second, Wilbur is in a sickbed in Dayton, OH at the Wright house on Hawthorne Street. Orville sits bedside.

MOTHER FATE

All is set.

CHORUS

But some still rise.
A riddle we know
And yet surprise.

MOTHER FATE

Their history,
written in a cold hand.

CHORUS

Your love
Is found by another
Rest assured
From brother to brother

MOTHER FATE

My love, our love,
goes by no name.

CHORUS

There is only reason
In the poetry of time,
And greatness will
Continue to climb.

MOTHER FATE

Alas, your reason,
also, reeks.

CHORUS

The perfume of bliss
Lingers too long
For the weary tones
Of a funeral song.

MOTHER FATE

One story
is never it all.

CHORUS

Perhaps it all
Is, too, tall.

SPARROW SONG

*In vigil by Wilbur's sickbed, Orville is visited by a sparrow at the window.
Orville sings a farewell aria to Wilbur.*

ORVILLE

Patient sparrow
Counted among high places
Is all we know.
This earth is but
A moment for you
Though my memory advances
With each of your
Precious hops.
The fluttering is nothing
I don't understand
And it's still a mystery.
Could we have counted
A more enviable lord?
Who made our minds
Into seers instead
Of only illusions,
Tempted our fates in
Place of prostration.
The slow march of
Progress is just another
Way for the future
To make sense of the past.
Those who will offer
A story or song in
Place of the know
Can only blink in
The moment of grace.
We, you and I, could
Feel it together and
Hold it forever.

As Wilbur dies, the Wright house accidentally catches on fire. At the same time, RED and BLUE are reunited in a barren field. They immediately set to work on building an enormous edifice that begins to take over the stage.

SERIOUS WORK

ORVILLE sits in a chair in the middle of a museum erected in his and Wilbur's honor. Models of their tools, gliders and planes rest in glass-enclosed display cases. RED and BLUE continue building their structure that includes scaffolding and canvas. By the end of this last scene, the structure has completely covered Orville and the stage.

RED

We'd have to build faster if we were going to make this last.

BLUE

I hear what you are saying, but about the journey?

RED

We have a schedule.

BLUE

Those birds up there keep their formation just so, remarkable...

RED

This is great, I know. I am glad we're doing this together.

BLUE

Let's sing about it.

RED

I don't know. This is serious work.

BLUE

Serious like what?

RED

I used to have fun spraying leaves off the driveway.

BLUE

That was serious work.

RED

I am glad you think so.

BLUE

Serious enough to sing about.

RED

I suppose we could sing about anything.

BLUE

The National Labor Relations Act.

RED

The Efficacy of Collaboration.

BLUE

Missile Telemetry.

RED

The Benefits of Behavioral Modification.

BLUE

That would make a great song.

RED (singing)

Take these words,

And build them

Into a little plane

For you and me

To fly away.

BLUE

Is that what we're doing here?

RED

I don't think so, but we may as well be.

BLUE

There are undeniable possibilities.

RED

But only these materials.

BLUE

Who cares?

RED

You may have a point.

BLUE

Today, perhaps, but I can't speak for tomorrow.

RED

I think tomorrow can speak for itself.

BLUE

I'm listening.

RED

Me, too.

CHORUS (heard singing in the background)

Take these words,

And build them

Into a little plane

For you and me

To fly away.

END